

MONDO CANE

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TOS DE GRIJTER & HIRALD THYS



FONDS MERCATOR

MONDO CANE

Artists Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys have been collaborating since 1987 after first meeting at Sint-Lukas art school in Brussels. Recognizing in each other a similar outlook on reality and how to observe it, they quickly bonded and began working together. At that time, the young artistic duo lived in Schietbeek, a municipality in northern Brussels where in the 1980s the quality of life was generally below average, especially compared to current standards. De Gruyter and Thys have seen and experienced a lot in Schietbeek and, still today, it seems their faces bear the traces of events that happened there, both big and small – like the memory of a local grocery store called Toet En, owned by a married couple, both alcoholics, where almost nothing was available for sale, only a few canned goods and cleaning supplies. Not far from there, the A12 highway connects the Brussels ring road to that of Antwerp. This axis has become quite naturally one of the artists' preferred playgrounds, as both willingly admit that they feel attracted to the psychotic state of contemporary societies. The motorway allows for many excursions and visits to an unlikely array of cultural and historic sites from time gone by. These elements of the past include a sixteenth-century Baroque chapel and a well-known dance club built using remains from chocolate brand Côté d'Or's pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. One might also admire a US tank symbolizing the 1944 Liberation of Western Europe or Le Corbusier's Maison Quatre – his first international commissioned work and his only building in Belgium – or perhaps visit Fort Breendonk, which was used as a prison camp by the Nazis from 1940 to 1944. It's also near this road that, in a co-op shop, de Gruyter and Thys bought a boat model that they used to use later in one of their films.

When they wanted to distance themselves from a reality that was sometimes too overwhelming, they visited de Gruyter's father in the countryside. Without planning or even any predetermined ideas, they would borrow a camera from their art school, enlist friends and family, and start shooting away from the city, creating their first video works together. *De Jachtvaller* (1988) was filmed during such a trip: it follows a freerunter undertaking small tasks, one moment after the other. The woodsman smokes his pipe, walks around the forest, contemplates the trees swaying in the wind, snags a truck, climbs down from a vantage point, lights a fire, makes some tea. Nothing much happens, all things considered. However, these set the stage and a particular tone for the examination of a provincial life, oscillating between the satisfaction of completing set tasks and the overbearing threat of boredom. Experiencing close collaboration, people, objects and spaces are simultaneously extremely identifiable and anonymous. Slowness rules over all actions, gestures and thoughts, enabling observation as well as confrontation.

A few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when urban breaks freed the European youth to think that anything was possible, the two artists travelled to Switzerland with two girlfriends and Harald's brother, Erik. During the trip, they shot *Whisper* (1989), in which Erik portrays the fictional great-grand-grandson of Edward Whymper (1860–1911), an English mountaineer and illustrator. The young man is hyperomantic, like a German Expressionist drawing come to life, and never achieves what he sets out to do. But he does arrive all summer to pay homage to his ancestor's adventurous spirit, driven by his family's legacy but also patriotic ambitions. The whole film is imbued with an eerie sense of idealism, which brings forth apparitions of all sorts against an Alpine backdrop. For the first time, de Gruyter and Thys let their characters' psyches unfold and influence their filmmaking, prompting many speculations.

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and hundreds of drawings, paintings, photographs and books carefully documenting their work. The only type of communication their work allows for is binary and stereotyped, and is explicitly revealed as such without prudishness. In the dense – if not saturated – visual culture of our day, their discourse stands out thanks to its baffling normality. Seemingly facial and neutral, it nonetheless fosters a specific tone and insistence, where anonymity signals what remains of reality. Surrounding figures of authority are also empty, transparent. And society appears to be deaf, repetitive and dull.

Willing victims of their observation of alterity, de Gruyter and Thys persevere and keep on creating artworks that seem to increasingly put humanity at a distance, so as to better approach it. In 2010 they undertook a new endeavour during the production of their film *Dax Luch*, working with inert material rather than living creatures. The artists gathered in one place several polystyrene heads sticking out of metal structures, and named them *Fritz*. Johannes, Hildegard, Ricco and Rocco. Paint, accessories and clothes are tasked with expressing their personality traits. But in spite of this effort at personification, nothing at all happens. Puzzled yet stimulated by such a complete paralysis, de Gruyter and Thys finally manage to animate the puppets when they set out to imagine each character's psychological and cultural environments. The protagonists of *Dax Luch* are Johannes, a painter undergoing an existential crisis, and Fritz, a self-assured man who likes women and state-of-the-art high tech, in a strange mix of apathy, clarity and restraint, both tell their stories. One shares his quest for meaning, the other his latest prowess. Their unspacular synthetic voices result from a software program. Everybody remains motionless, and the only movement visible on screen is the camera zooming in and out, or setting up for a new still shot. Using very few means, the film succeeds in depicting the cruel humiliation exerted by material life on spiritual life. It is a revelation.

Puppets present a definite upside in that they are forever frozen in time. Substitutes for humans, desired by humans, they maintain an interactive relationship with their creators that is almost incestuous. Moreover, their makers seem to have breathed their own life into their creations so as to better scrutinize themselves, but also to evoke a specific form of earnest. The addition of puppets to the artists' language provides them with a new possibility: developing series of human-like simulators. Their production has imperfections, but perfectly embodies the spirit of their work, and carries it out without batting an eye.

On the occasion of an exhibition in Denmark in 2018, de Gruyter and Thys presented 41 small plaster heads. The sculptures portray fictional and real people, who all operated in private or public spheres. Among them are featured high-profile politicians and show business and marketing people, but also illustrious nobodies. There is no hierarchy, no value judgements:

victims and murderers are displayed equally on small shelves on the wall, reminiscent of hunting trophies. Gathered together in that fashion, the composite sculpture fades away, allowing for a new community to emerge, all the more uncanny as it is believable. Increasingly interested in production and reproduction effects, de Gruyter and Thys spend a lot of time exploring the internet. By doing so, they enjoy scaring themselves, watching things they shouldn't. The online network is over-sprawling, and supremely competent in automatizing, proliferating, selecting, broadcasting and repeating information. The artists send each other YouTube videos, thanks to the online platform, they can travel through innumerable local and international cultural practices, all the while experiencing small but reiterated shocks. For instance, the duo likes to watch car accidents happening in Russia. The videos are captured from the modes of the cars with dashboard cameras. There are thousands of them and they all share the same scenario: someone is driving a car, the radio is on, another car comes in too fast from a turning and crashes into the first one. It's highly addictive. It's also an easy way of discovering the country through its landscapes, its peripheries, its music, and moreover acquiring a better understanding of its cultural practices – here it is chiefly the Russian experience of fate, which is almost spiritual.

De Gruyter and Thys have also taken a keen interest in Wikipedia, which offers quasi-infinite entries about the various and varied places, people, objects and places of the world around us. The artists appreciate and value the sheer amount of written and visual data generated by an invisible human entity. Topics are infinitely mobile, yet they accumulate to form an encyclopedic corpus, unified by the collective will to create truth, objectivity and comprehensiveness. In 2019, under the influence of contemporary reality, the artists have accelerated their pace of work once more. Having come to welcome the advantages of outsourcing production, they have set up a team that assists them in the manufacture of their artworks.

The 3D printers are working day and night. Puppets are being built and now they are automatized, their mechanical frames enabling purely formal movement. Hundreds of illustrations have been drawn, scanned and printed, sometimes on washable and waterproof materials. Copyholders have been assigned to correcting no less than 1,228 types and errors found in various texts, and more than 267 found and collected videos must be viewed before being sorted under new categories. Everyone is doing their best, taking part in compiling a community of foreign bodies that carries the spirit of the artwork as well as the souls animating it.

The following year, Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys are witnesses to a strange, almost unnamable event, one which soon immerses itself in the expression of their work and gives it an unexpected turn.

Anne-Claire Schmitz

EXHIBITION
This book was published in conjunction with the exhibition

MONDO CANE
by Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys

Belgian Pavilion
58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia
11 May –24 November 2019



Commissioner
Federation Wallonie-Bruxelles



Curator
Anne-Claire Schmitz

Assistants to the curator
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Communication
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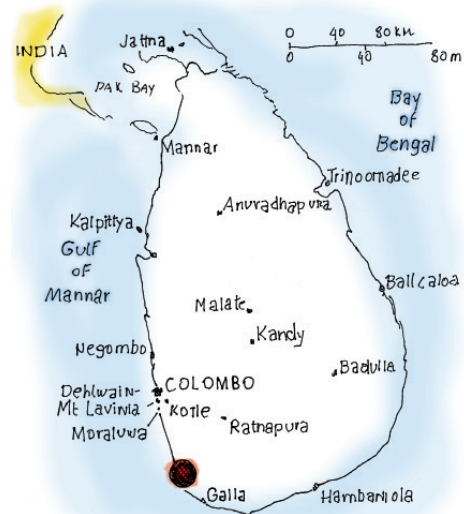
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2004 SRI LANKA TSUNAMI TRAIN WRECK

The 2004 Sri Lanka tsunami rail disaster is the largest single rail disaster in world history in terms of its death toll, with probably 1,700 fatalities or more. It occurred when a crowded passenger train was destroyed on a coastal railway in Sri Lanka by a tsunami that followed the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake. The tsunami subsequently caused over 30,000 reported deaths and billions of rupees in property damage in the coastal areas of Sri Lanka.

TRAIN

Train #50 was a regular train operating between the cities of Colombo and Matara. The route runs along the southwestern coast of Sri Lanka,



and at Telwatta only about 200 m inland from the sea. On Sunday 26 December 2004, during both the Buddhist full moon holiday and the Christmas holiday weekend, it left Colombo's Fort Station shortly after 6.50 a.m. with over 1,500 paid passengers and an unknown number of unpaid passengers including those with travel passes (called 'Seasons') and government travel permits.

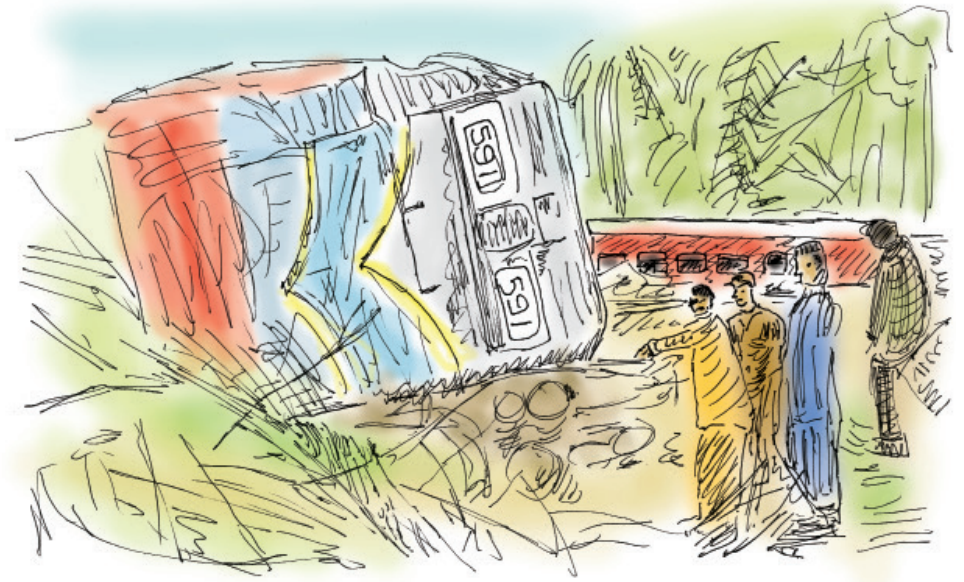
The train was pulled by locomotive #591 *Manitoba*, a Sri Lanka Railways class M2a built in 1956 by General Motors Diesel of Canada as a model G12.

ATTEMPTS TO STOP THE TRAIN

Sri Lanka's seismic monitoring station at Palkekele registered the earthquake within minutes but did not consider it possible for a tsunami to reach the island. When tsunami reports first reached the dispatch office in Maradana, officials were able to halt eight trains running on the Coastal Line, but were unable to reach the Matara Express. Efforts to halt the train at Ambalangoda failed because all station personnel were assisting with the train, and no one was available to answer the phone until after the train had departed. Attempts to reach personnel at stations further south failed as they had fled or been killed by the waves.

TSUNAMI WAVES STRIKE THE CROWDED TRAIN

At 9.30 a.m., in the village of Peraliya, near Telwatta, the beach saw the first of the gigantic waves thrown up by the earthquake. The train came to a halt as water surged around it, and an alarm sounded to alert the population about the increase in the water level. Hundreds of locals, believing the train to be secure on the rails, climbed onto the top of the carriages to avoid being swept away.



Others stood behind the train, hoping it would shield them from the force of the water. The first wave flooded the carriages and caused panic among the passengers. Ten minutes later a huge wave picked up the train and smashed it against the trees and houses that lined the track, crushing those seeking shelter behind it. The eight carriages were so packed with people that the doors could not be opened, while they filled with water, drowning almost everyone inside as the water washed over the wreckage several more times. The passengers on top of the train were thrown clear of the uprooted carriages, and most drowned or were crushed by debris. Locomotive #591 *Manitoba* was carried 100 m, coming to rest in a swamp. Both engineer Janaka Fernando and assistant Sivaloganathan died at their posts. Estimates based on the state

of the shoreline and a high-water mark on a nearby building place the tsunami 7.5 to 9 m above sea level and 2 to 3 m higher than the top of the train.

CASUALTIES

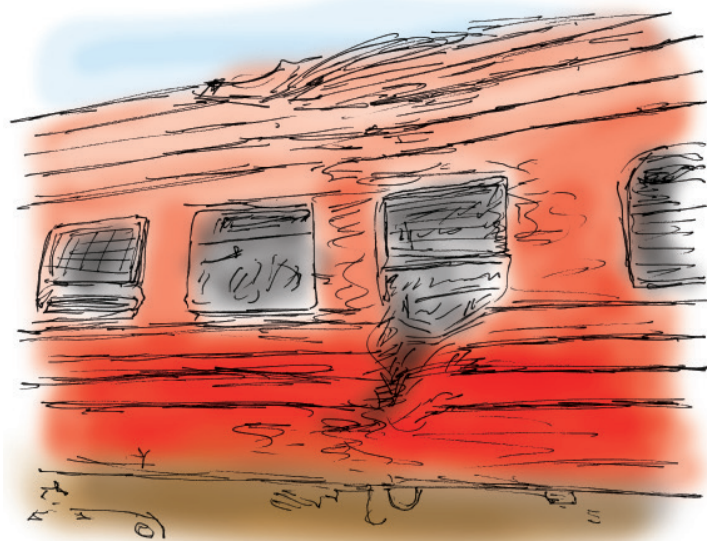
Due to the huge scale of the tsunami disaster, the local authorities were unable to cope with the devastation, and emergency services and the military were so overwhelmed that immediate rescue was not possible. In fact, the Sri Lankan authorities had no idea where the train was for several hours, until it was spotted by an army helicopter at around 4 p.m. The local emergency services were destroyed, and it was a long time before help arrived. Dozens of people badly injured in the disaster died in the wreckage during the day, and many bodies were not retrieved for over a week.

Some families descended on the area determined to find their relatives themselves. A forensic team from Colombo photographed and fingerprinted the unclaimed bodies at Batapola Hospital so that the records could be stored and looked at after the bodies had been buried. According to the Sri Lankan authorities, only about 150 people on the train survived. The estimated death toll was at least 1,700 people, and probably over 2,000, although only approximately 900 bodies were recovered, as many were swept out to sea or taken away by relatives. The village of Peraliya was also destroyed, losing hundreds of citizens and all but ten buildings to the waves. Venerable Baddegama Samitha, a Buddhist monk, helped perform funeral rites along with his students, many of whom couldn't sleep for three weeks afterwards. More than two hundred of the bodies

retrieved were not identified or claimed, and were buried three days later in a Buddhist ceremony near the torn railway line.

AFTERMATH

Ceremonies commemorating the first anniversary were held in the rebuilt village alongside the repaired railway, which still operates a Colombo to Galle service, employing the same guard, W. Karunatilaka, who was on the train and survived the disaster. Locomotive #591 *Manitoba* and two of the damaged carriages were salvaged and rebuilt. A wave was added to the locomotive's paint job as a memorial. The rebuilt locomotive and carriages returned to Peraliya on 26 December 2008, and every year since, to take part in a religious ceremony and a memorial, held to remember those who lost their lives.



LA VOISIN

Catherine Monvoisin, or Montvoisin, née Catherine Deshayes, known as 'La Voisin' (c. 1640–1680), was a French fortune teller, commissioned poisoner and professional provider of alleged sorcery. She was the head of a network of fortune tellers in Paris providing poison, aphrodisiacs, abortion, supposedly magical services and arranging black masses. She had clients among the aristocracy and became the central figure in the famous *affaire des poisons*. Her alleged organization of black magic on commission and murder by poison was suspected to have killed anywhere between 1,000 and 2,500 people.

LIFE

Catherine Deshayes married Antoine Monvoisin, a jeweller and silk merchant, who had a shop at Pont Marie in Paris. When her husband became ruined, La Voisin supported the family by practising palmistry and face-reading. In addition to being a fortune teller, she was also active as a midwife, including the carrying out of abortions. Her business as a fortune teller gradually developed into manufacturing and selling magical objects and potions, arranging black masses, and selling aphrodisiacs and poisons in order to take advantage of her clients' wishes for their future lives.

By the late 1660s La Voisin had become a wealthy and famous fortune teller with clients among France's nobility. Her clients included Olympia Mancini, comtesse de Soissons; Marie Anne Mancini, duchesse de Bouillon; Elizabeth, comtesse de Gramont; and François-Henri de Montmorency, duc de Luxembourg.

La Voisin lived in Villeneuve-sur-Gravois, where she received her clients by day and



entertained the Parisian aristocracy with musical soirées in her garden by night. She regularly attended services at the church of the Jansenist abbé de Sant-Amour, principal of Paris University, and the godmother of her daughter was the noblewoman Mme de la Roche-Guyon.

She supported a family of six, including her husband, her mother and her children. She was known to have at least six lovers: the executioner André Guillaume, Monsieur Latour, vicomte de Cousserans, the comte de Labatie, the alchemist Blessis, the architect Fauchet and the magician Adam Lesage. At one point, Lesage tried to induce her to kill her husband, but although he was initially successful, La Voisin changed her mind and aborted the process.

La Voisin was interested in science and alchemy and financed several private projects,

some of them concocted by con artists who tried to swindle her. She was known to suffer from alcoholism, was apparently abused by Latour, and engaged in several conflicts with her rival, the poisoner Marie Bosse.

Abortions

La Voisin apparently started to include abortions, illegal at the time, for profit within her services as a midwife, and her clients eventually included wealthy members of the aristocracy. She had a network of abortion providers working for her, notably Catherine Lepère, who stated that she received her clients from La Voisin, who referred clients to her and took the majority of the profit as fee. Marie Bosse claimed that fetuses that had been aborted late in the pregnancy were burned in a furnace at the house of La Voisin and buried in her garden. However, as Louis XIV ordered that the part of La Voisin's enterprise that involved abortions should not be pursued further, this element is the least investigated and unknown, and Bosse's claims therefore remain unconfirmed.

Fortune telling

La Voisin later said about her activity as a fortune teller that she had merely used and developed what God had given her. She stated that she was taught the art of fortune telling at the age of nine, and that after her husband became bankrupt, she decided to profit from it. She developed her art by studying the modern methods of physiology, and the art of reading the client's future by studying their faces and palms.

She spent a great deal of money on creating an atmosphere that would make her clients more inclined to believe her prophecies: for example, for her performance she had made a special robe of crimson red velvet

embroidered with golden eagles, which cost 1,500 livres.

In 1665 or 1666 her divination was questioned by the Congregation of the Mission at the order of Saint Vincent de Paul and she was called for questioning, but La Voisin defended herself successfully before the professors at Sorbonne university and was allowed to continue working as a fortune teller.

Professional sorcery

La Voisin's business as a fortune teller gradually developed into one of alleged black magic. While practising as a fortune teller, she noticed similarities among her clients' wishes about their futures: almost all wanted to have someone fall in love with them; that someone would die so that they might inherit; or that their spouses would die, so that they might marry someone else.

La Voisin decided to profit financially from her clients' wishes by offering magical services to make their wishes come true. Initially, she told her clients that their wishes would come true if they were also the will of God. Secondly, she started to recommend to her clients some action that would make their dreams come true, such as visiting the church of some particular saint. Then she started to sell lucky charms and gradually recommended more and more supposedly magical objects or rituals of various kinds.

For those clients who wished for someone to fall in love with them, La Voisin manufactured love powders: toads' bones, moles' teeth, Spanish fly, iron filings, human blood and *mummy*, and the dust of human remains were among the alleged ingredients of the love powders that she concocted.

Her most radical and expensive recommended practice was the black mass, which she arranged for clients for profit, during which





the client could pray to Satan for their wish to come true. During at least some of these masses, a woman performed as an altar, upon which a bowl was placed: a baby was held above the bowl, and the blood from it was poured into the bowl. Whether the baby in question was actually killed on this occasion, or whether the baby was already dead by natural causes, such as being stillborn, could vary. La Voisin had several associates working for her in arranging and participating in her professional magic services: notably Adam Lesage, who performed the alleged magic; and the priest Étienne Guibourg and abbé Mariotte, who officiated at the black masses.

Poison commissions

La Voisin finally took the step from selling magical potions, amulets and rituals, to selling aphrodisiacs to those who wished for someone

to fall in love with them, and fatal poison to those who wished for someone to die.

The art of poisoning had become a regular science at the time, having been perfected, in part, by Giulia Tofana, a professional female poisoner in Italy, only a few decades before La Voisin. La Voisin provided a large variety of poisons for her clients and had a network of poison providers working for her, notably the apothecary Catherine Trianon. However, her knowledge of poisons was not apparently so thorough as that of less well-known sorcerers, or it would be difficult to account for Louise de La Vallière's immunity.

Hired by Madame de Montespan

The most important of La Voisin's clients was Madame de Montespan, official royal mistress to King Louis XIV of France. Their contact was often performed through

Claude de Vin des Eillets, Montespan's companion. Montespan was alleged to have hired La Voisin in 1667 to arrange a black mass, which was celebrated in a house in rue de la Tannerie. Lesage and Mariotte officiated, while Montespan prayed to win the love of Louis XIV. The same year, Montespan became the King's official mistress and she subsequently employed La Voisin whenever a problem occurred in her relationship with him.

In 1673, when the King's interest in Montespan seemed to wane, Montespan again employed La Voisin, who provided a series of black masses officiated by Guibourg.

On at least one occasion, Montespan herself acted as the human altar during the mass. La Voisin also provided Montespan with an aphrodisiac, with which Montespan drugged the King. During Louis XIV's affair with Madame de Soubise, Montespan used an aphrodisiac provided by La Voisin's colleague Françoise Filastre and made by Louis Galet in Normandy.

In 1677, Montespan made it clear that if the King should abandon her, she would have him killed. When he entered into a relationship with Angélique de Fontanges in 1679, Montespan called for La Voisin and asked her to have both him and Fontanges killed. La Voisin hesitated, but was eventually convinced to agree. At the house of her colleague Catherine Trianon, La Voisin, together with the poisoners Trianon, Bertrand and Romani (the fiancé of La Voisin's daughter), formulated a plan to murder the King. Trianon was unwilling to participate and tried to make La Voisin change her mind by creating an ill-fated fortune for her, but La Voisin stood firm. The group decided to kill the King by poisoning a petition, to be delivered into his own hands.

On 5 March 1679, La Voisin visited the royal court in Saint-Germain to deliver the petition. That day, however, there were too many petitioners and the King did not take their petitions, which foiled her plan. Upon her return to her home in Paris, she was castigated by a group of monks. She handed the petition to her daughter Marguerite Montvoisin and asked her to burn it, which she did. The next day, she made plans to visit Trianon after mass, to plan the next murder attempt on Louis XIV.

Arrest

The death of the duchesse d'Orléans, the King's sister-in-law, had been falsely attributed to poison, and the crimes of Madame de Brinvilliers (executed in 1676) and her accomplices were still fresh in the public mind. In parallel, a riot took place where people accused witches of abducting children for the black masses, and priests reported that in their confessions a growing number of people were confessing to poisoning. In 1677 the fortune teller Magdelaine de La Grange was arrested for poisoning, and claimed that she had information about crimes of high importance. The arrest of the successful fortune teller and poisoner Marie Bosse and Marie Vigoreaux in January 1679 made the police aware that there existed a network of fortune tellers in Paris who dealt in the distribution of poison. On 12 March 1679, La Voisin was arrested outside Notre-Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle after having heard mass, just before her meeting with Trianon. The following month a commission appointed to inquire into the subject and to prosecute the offenders met for the first time. Its proceedings, including some suppressed in the official records, are preserved in the notes of Gabriel Nicolas de la Reynie, one of the official court reporters.

Investigation and trial

At the arrest of La Voisin, her maid Margot stated that the arrest would mean the end of a number of people in all levels of society. La Voisin was imprisoned at Vincennes, where she was subjected to questioning. On 27 December 1679, Louis XIV issued an order that the whole network should be eliminated at all costs, regardless of rank, gender or age. The arrest of La Voisin was followed by the arrest of her daughter Marguerite, Guibourg, Lesage, Bertrand, Romani and the rest of her associates.

La Voisin was never subjected to torture: although a formal order was issued giving permission for its use, it was made clear that the order was not to be put into effect. It is suggested that it was feared that she might reveal the names of influential people if she were questioned under force. Aware of her alcoholism, however, her interrogators reportedly kept her in a state of drunkenness during her interrogations. Her confrontations with the other accused, particularly Lesage and Bosse, were especially effective. Initially she claimed to have referred to Bosse all those clients wishing to buy poison. In March, however, she named Marguerite Leferon and Françoise de Dreux as her own clients, and on 10 October she admitted having sold poison and magical services to several members of the royal court; she also described how her career had developed.

La Voisin never mentioned Montespan as her client during the interviews, nor did she mention having arranged or participated in black masses. She once mentioned to the guards that the question she feared most was that they would ask her about her visits to the royal court. It is likely that she was referring to Montespan as her client and her attempt at murdering the King, and that she feared that

such a confession would result in her execution for regicide. Her list of clients, the arranging of the black masses, her connection to Montespan and the murder attempt on the King were not revealed until after her death, when stated by her daughter and confirmed by the testimonies of her former associates.

Trial and execution

On 17 February 1680, La Voisin was put on trial, and two days later was convicted of witchcraft, the punishment for which was to be execution by burning. During the days following her verdict and before her execution, she was to be formally interrogated under torture, the official document stating that she was tortured until she begged for mercy. However, while an official permit of torture was issued, the police were given to understand that the permit was not to be used, and de la Reynie stated that La Voisin was in reality never subjected to torture. Madame de Sévigné, who observed La Voisin shortly before her execution, described her as being able to move so freely and so seemingly healthy that it did not seem possible that she should have been subjected to torture. These final interrogations did not reveal anything new.

La Voisin was executed in public on the place de Grève in Paris on 22 February 1680. On her way to her execution she reportedly rejected the priest, and when fastened on the stake she desperately pushed away the hay that was piled up around her.

In July her daughter Marguerite revealed La Voisin's connection with Montespan, which was confirmed by the statements of the other accused. This caused the monarch to eventually close the investigation, seal the testimonies and place the remaining accused outside the public justice system by imprisoning them under a *lettre de cachet*.

PYTHONIDAE

The Pythonidae, commonly known simply as 'pythons', from the Greek word *python* (πυθων), are a family of nonvenomous snakes found in Africa, Asia and Australia. Among its members are some of the largest snakes in the world. Eight genera and thirty-one species are currently recognized.

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

Pythons are found in sub-Saharan Africa, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Burma, southern China, Southeast Asia, and southeast from the Philippines through Indonesia to New Guinea and Australia.

In the United States, an introduced population of Burmese pythons, *Python molurus bivittatus*, has existed as an invasive species in the Everglades National Park, Florida, since the late 1990s.

CONSERVATION

Many species have been hunted aggressively, which has greatly reduced the population of some, such as the Indian python, *Python molurus*.

BEHAVIOUR

Most members of this family are ambush predators, in that they typically remain motionless in a camouflaged position, and then strike suddenly at passing prey. They will generally attack any animal or human when feeling hungry or provoked. Pythons longer than 2.1 m can kill adult humans even if the weight of the snake is only 20 kg. Reports of attacks on humans were once common in South and Southeast Asia but are now quite rare, although females protecting their eggs can be aggressive. In March 2017 a 25-year-old man was found dead inside a 23-foot python on the island



of Sulawesi, Indonesia, and in June 2018 a 54-year-old woman was found dead in a similar sized python.

FEEDING

Pythons use their sharp, backward-curving teeth – four rows in the upper jaw, two in the lower – to grasp prey, which is then killed by constriction: after grasping an animal to restrain it, the python quickly wraps a number of coils around it. Death occurs primarily by cardiac arrest.

Larger specimens usually eat animals about the size of a house cat, but larger food items are known: some large Asian species have been known to take down adult deer, and the African rock python, *Python sebae*, has been known to eat antelope. All prey is swallowed whole, and may take several days or even weeks to fully digest.

Contrary to popular belief, even the larger species, such as the reticulated python, *Python reticulatus*, do not crush their prey to death; in fact, prey is not even noticeably deformed before it is swallowed. The speed with which the coils are applied is impressive, but although the force they exert may be significant, death is caused by cardiac arrest.

REPRODUCTION

Pythons are oviparous: that is, they lay eggs. This sets them apart from the *Boidae* (boa) family, most of which bear live young (ovoviviparous). After they lay their eggs, female pythons typically incubate them until they hatch. This is achieved by causing the muscles to ‘shiver’, which raises the temperature of the body to a certain degree, and thus that of the eggs. Keeping the eggs at a constant temperature is essential for healthy embryo development.

During the incubation period, females will not eat and only leave to bask to raise their body temperature.

CAPTIVITY

Most species in this family are available in the exotic pet trade. However, caution must be exercised with the larger species, as they can be dangerous; rare cases of large specimens killing their owners have been documented.

TAXONOMY

Obsolete classification schemes – such as that of Boulenger (1890) – place pythons in *Pythoninae*, a subfamily of the boa family, *Boidae*. However, despite a superficial resemblance to boas, pythons are more closely related to sunbeam snakes, *Xenopeltis*, and burrowing pythons, *Loxocemus*.



VERKEHRSTAU

Ein Verkehrsstau (kurz Stau) ist ein stark stockender oder zum Stillstand gekommener Verkehrsfluss auf einer Straße. Als einer der Gründe dafür gilt eine zu hohe Anzahl von Fahrzeugen pro Zeiteinheit (oder pro Streckenlänge). Jedoch können Staus auch entstehen, obwohl die Kapazität der Straße bei gleichmäßig verteiltem und fließendem Verkehr ausreichte. Im Gegensatz zum Halten zählt der Verkehrsstau zum fließenden Verkehr. Staus – auch solche auf Wasserstraßen, Eisenbahnschienen, auf Flughäfen oder im Luftraum („Warteschleife“) – sind ein Forschungsgegenstand der Verkehrswissenschaften. Fluchtwege für Fußgänger in Gebäuden und bei Großveranstaltungen werden zur Reduktion von Staugefahr breit und flüssig gestaltet und Besucherzahlen begrenzt.

Verkehrsexperten unterscheiden zwischen „Stau“ und „stockendem Verkehr“. In der Schweiz wird beispielsweise „fachlich“ von einem Stau gesprochen, wenn der Straßenverkehr mindestens für eine Minute mit weniger als 10 km/h fließt. Liegt die Geschwindigkeit im Bereich zwischen 10 und 30 km/h, spricht man von stockendem Verkehr.

URSACHEN

Typischerweise liegt die Kapazität einer Straße bei 1500 bis 2500 Fahrzeugen pro Stunde und Spur. Herabgesetzt werden kann die Kapazität z. B. durch *ungünstige Witterung* wie Regen, Schnee oder Glatteis sowie *ineffektives Verhalten der Verkehrsteilnehmer*, z. B. durch Schaulust. Dadurch können Staus aus dem Nichts entstehen, bei denen den Verkehrsteilnehmern auch nach Ende des Staus die Ursache verborgen bleibt (im Gegensatz zu Unfällen und Baustellen, bei denen die Ursachen bei der Vorbeifahrt erkannt werden können).

Eine lokal verringerte Kapazität des Verkehrswegs durch Ereignisse wie Spursperrungen aufgrund von Baustellen oder Unfällen sowie Fahrbahnverengungen z. B. vor Tunneln begünstigen die Stauentstehung ebenfalls. Eine solche kapazitätslimitierende Verengung des Verkehrsweges wird auch *Nadelöhr* genannt.

Auch ein erhöhtes Verkehrsaufkommen kann für Staus verantwortlich sein. Gründe dafür können Berufsverkehr, Reiseverkehr (besonders zu Beginn und am Ende von Ferien sowie samstäglicher „Bettenwechsel“ in Urlaubsgebieten) und Großveranstaltungen sein.

STAU-ERKENNUNG

Visuelle Beobachtung

Über freiwillige Staumelder, Polizeistreifen, Kameras und Hubschrauber werden Straßen und Verkehrsknotenpunkte visuell beobachtet.

Stationäres Erfassungssystem

Mittels fest montierter Sensoren an der Autobahn wird der Verkehrsfluss objektiv gemessen. Hierbei wird nur die linke Fahrspur überwacht, da über die Parameter Abstand und Geschwindigkeit auf der linken Spur auf die Verkehrsdichte der anderen Spuren geschlossen werden kann. Auf deutschen Autobahnen befindet sich im Schnitt alle 4 Kilometer ein Sensor, so dass hier insgesamt rund 4000 Sensoren im Einsatz sind.

Floating Car Data (FCD) /

Floating Phone Data (FPD)

Bei diesem modernen Verfahren werden in Fahrzeugen mitgeführte Mobiltelefone oder eingebaute Geräte (i. d. R. mit einem Sender ausgerüstete GPS-Empfänger) zur Messung der Verkehrsgeschwindigkeit und der Reisezeit verwendet. Das Verfahren *Floating Cellular Data* mit den Mobiltelefonen ist unpräziser